



Contents available at : <http://jls.tu.edu.iq>

Journal of Language Studies

ISSN 2616- 6224



Mysticism in ‘A Christmas Carol’ By Charles Dickens

Ihsan Mehdar Mahmoud Abdel*

University of Tikrit / Faculty of Arts / Translation Department

Hyoucif@tu.edu.iq

<p>Keywords: -Charles Dickens -novella -spiritualism -mysticism -redemption - transformation.</p> <p>Article Info</p>	<p>Abstract: This research investigates the novella written by Charles Dickens to highlight the concept of the spiritual journey of transformation. Mysticism is an approach found in most of Dickens’ writings. The vital one which is under current study is ‘A Christmas Carol’ (1843). The research illustrates a representation of the title and the purpose of its choice. However, the main theme that is investigated is the symbolic spiritual journey held by the three spirits. In his novel, Dickens tries to highlight that the transformation from a stingy rich businessman into a humanist is only through spirituality. According to the seventeenth century, the mystical type boomed in England (Spurgeon, 1970). Subsequently, Dickens is affected by this thematic function and tries to portray this in his writings. Starting from an emotional barricade at the first chapter, Dickens underscores that the spiritual journey is the door leading to the salvation and redemption. He pinpoints that moralities are not restricted only to the religious occasions. However, mysticism must be an approach in human life to enter Heaven.</p>
<p>Article history: -Received 15/4/2018 -Accepted 25/4/2018 Available online 1/5/2018</p>	

* Corresponding Author :Asst.:Ihsan Mehdar Mahmoud Abdel ,E-Mail : Hyoucif@tu.edu.iq ,
Tel:009647701715071 , Affiliation _ : , Un University of Tikrit / Faculty of Arts / Translation Department-Iraq

التصوف في "كارول عيد الميلاد" بقلم تشارلز ديكنز

الخلاصة: يتناول هذا البحث رواية "ترنيمه الميلاد" هي رواية للروائي تشارلز ديكنز، حيث يتناول البحث الفكرة الأساسية للرواية وهي فكرة الخلاص والتطهير الكينوني للشخصية الأساسية وهي "سكروج" من كونه ثري فظ، لا يهتم بغيره، ولا يهتم بأي شيء غير كثر الأموال، إلى شخص حنون يشعر بغيره ويعطف عليهم، وذلك من خلال مفهوم الصوفية والروحانية في الرواية.

تعتبر هذه الرواية هي من أهم الروايات في الديانة المسيحية التي تتناول الفكرة الدينية لعيد ميلاد المسيح من الجانب الروحاني والصوفي، حيث أن الخلاص تم من خلال رحلة مع الأشباح (من الماضي والحاضر والمستقبل)، هذه الرحلة هي بمثابة معبر لتغيير النهاية الحتمية لمن يكنز الأموال فقط – مثل ما حدث مع رفيقه (مارلي).. بطل الرواية هو محور الرواية حيث أن هؤلاء الأشباح قاموا بزيارته لتحذيره من الإتكاء على جمع المال فقط، فليس هو في طريق الوصول للجهة المطلوبة، وبنهاية الرواية نجد أن النهاية الحتمية قد تغيرت إثر رحلته الروحانية عبر حياته.

1- Introduction

Literature shapes the sentiments and the tastes about what is beautiful, beneficial, and kind, as well as what is opposite to these. It educates the readers and guides their inclinations. Not only it teaches the reader how to conduct a contact with others but also it boosts the capacity for moral discernment. Dickens is a religious and a mystic novelist. He tends to follow mysticism in his writings. Subsequently, charity is one of the main themes in his writings because he was a coeval of the privation era. Because of Dickens' life conditions, he decided to write a pamphlet on the circumstances of the poor and the low classes. However, in 1843, he turns his pamphlet into a novel called '*A Christmas Carol*'. He believes that through novels, one's opinions would be more powerful and effective. *Carol* means a type of dance used to be there in medieval times in France. Then, it is used to be the song that plays with the dance in Christmas. He 'revolutionized' the portrayal of Christmas by all the classes especially the lower one. In this respect Charles Dickens wrote at the beginning of his novel:

I have endeavored in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humor with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it. (1843, Preface).

The main theme by Dickens is the reclamation of the protagonist Ebenezer Scrooge who is haunted by the ghost of his partner. Dickens warns against Ignorance and Want. Through mysticism, he highlights the main themes to let his readers think compassionately of people and to accept the lower classes. Dickens chooses this title to indicate that this day should not show selfishness and greed which become dominant then. He portrays Fred and Cratchit as they are celebrating Christmas not only for entertainment but also for reviving Christ's teachings. This day for Fred is for *'kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time'*. Dickens underpins that the human heart is by nature compassionate. Yet, unless business coexists with this heartfelt emotional spirituality, it will corrupt the passion and souls.

The Aim of the Study

This study aims at highlighting the main theme of Dickens' writings: mysticism. It focuses mainly on two sections. The first section represents Scrooge as a busy businessman sitting in a *'cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal'* (1843: *ch.1.P. 17*,). Then, the last chapter, which is symmetrical to the first, portrays him as a man with heartfelt appreciations for others. The current research

underpins that Dickens follows the mystical approach to achieve the redemption of the character. This is a symbolic function for the human beings in the real world.

The Value of the Study

The current study goes through '*A Christmas Carol*' novel with a panoramic view to investigate the mechanism that Dickens uses to reach salvation. This relies on Dickens' religious moorings which never cross the bounds of dogma using an optimistic tone (1899, P. 305). The study explores that Dickens focuses on the character of Scrooge to echo the language of political economy. Through the depiction of this character, Dickens highlights poverty and squalor. However, the appeal for charity forces Scrooge to redeem himself. Through the figure of Scrooge as a philanthropist at the end of the novel, Dickens offers a portrait of 'benevolence'.

Literature Review

This section explains some of the reviews on Dickens' writing and some of the mystical writings in Poetry, specifically. It also sheds light on the meaning of Mysticism.

Previous Studies

Smith, Andrew 2012, describes Dickens as one of the writers who wanted to crystallize the notion of Christmas in the social notions prevailing in the community. He focuses on the concept that Dickens doesn't represent Christmas in Christianity. Rather, he highlights that the humane attitude should be followed with family, the poor and with life's reflection.

Woolf, Virginia 1986: P. 35, mentions that Dickens master the mechanism by which he can reshape the ‘psychological geography’. Besides, he portrays characters that exist in ‘a cluster of wild yet extraordinarily revealing remarks’. While Britain was filled with economic and political power, Charles Dickens focused on the life of the poor and the lower classes. He participates in guiding the public opinion to consider the class inequality by his way of depicting the exploitation and the oppression of the working class.

Concerning the usage of mysticism in poetry, Emmanuel Swedenborg believes that the human being reflects the divine life as a recipient of life. The focused notion in his writing is that God is the source of the light and spiritual heat. In addition, he believes that the spiritual transformation is through one’s love, (*Rose, Shotwell & Bertucci, 2005*). While William Blake considers himself as a prophet and his vision is only about revelation, he also symbolizes images which exist in ‘a higher invisible world’, (*Spurgeon 1970*).

Charles Dickens as a Mystic Writer

Dickens is an English novelist who is known for his advocacy for socialism. He was one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian era. Charles John Huffam Dickens (1812-1870) was born in Portsmouth, England. Although he didn’t continue his education, he worked as an editor for a weekly journal for twenty years and wrote about 15 novels focusing on spirituality and mysticism. In addition, he delivered lectures; he was so interested in the social-reforms field. By the twentieth century, he was considered to be one of the genius writers in literature.

Unprecedentedly, his works, then, were popular. In 1843, Dickens wrote his first Christmas stories, ‘*A Christmas Carol*’ - ‘*Being a Ghost story of Christmas*’. He had the seeds of this story from his journey observing the harsh working

condition of the workers and the strenuous life; therefore, Dickens was a philanthropist who used to set up homes for vulnerable women and the working class- this is reflected in his work and his passion in mystic writings. ‘*A Christmas Carol*’ is one of the vigorous critiques of how social and political institutions, as well as wealthy and middle-class individuals neglect the welfare of the poor.

Mysticism in Nutshell

Mysticism according to ‘*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*’ (1911) is derived from the word mystic, ‘*the one who believes in spiritual apprehension of truths beyond the understanding*’, the dictionary adds ‘*mysticism is often used in a semi-contemptuous way to denote vaguely any kind of occultism or spiritualism, or any especially curious or fantastic views about God and the universe*’. Dickens uses the term mysticism and depicts it to play a vital role in the development of his main character’s thoughts and knowledge. Through this depiction, he reflects his own thought and his religious attitude. This is clear from Scrooge in ‘*A Christmas Carol*’ where mysticism becomes the flame that feeds his life and helps him to redeem himself.

Mysticism in *A Christmas Carol*

This section highlights how Dickens deploys mysticism to achieve Scrooge's salvation and redemption throughout the novel. The spiritual and mystic journey from the Past, to the Present and then to the Future is the seeds that affect the transformation of the protagonist.

The Seeds of Strenuous Characters and the Glimpse of Transformation

Dickens starts the novel by a frigid atmosphere in London as a way to represent that the common thoughts are only for money and business and nothing for compassion. In Chapter One, Dickens portrays ‘the First Ghost’ who haunts Scrooge to help him redeem himself: ‘Marley’s Ghost’. From the very beginning, we find that Dickens wants to highlight the real truth in the worldly life by saying: ‘*Marley was dead, to begin with*’, (1843: Ch. 1. P. 15),

By the commencement, the reader understands that Dickens wants to achieve the concept of reclamation through the concept of death exposure. Then in the same paragraph, the religious thought and mystical concepts appear quite strong through using words like ‘*clergyman, the clerk... etc.*’(15-16)

By the depiction of Isolation, Scrooge is deployed to be the ‘*sole friend, and soul mourner*’ (15),. Dickens tries to concentrate on the concept that nobody would be happy alone. Everyone must find fellowmen to cheer with and not to focus mainly on money hoarding. Besides, redemption is only to be through mysticism. Therefore, Dickens focuses on that

‘Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnized it with an undoubted bargain’’. (15).

These quotations indicate that the past and memory are part and parcel of the main character's thought during his journey in life till his redemption. The atmosphere created by Dickens refers to Scrooge's attitude: 'No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he'.(17)

As a result, Dickens tries to illustrate that the rich villain has no feelings. Subsequently, he paves the way for his readers, later on, to accept the redemption. Nonetheless, it is only accepted through philanthropy and mysticism. Scrooge builds a barrier between himself and others to the extent that 'Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me? No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle...(17).

Through this portrayal, Dickens lets his readers carry hatred for this character and never pity him. On the contrary, they should believe that 'It was the very thing he liked' (17).

His passion is only about money. He lives in isolation with no compassion and he likes his life. This is how Dickens depicts the extreme (i.e. from a very tough businessman into a very soft-hearted human). The mechanism through this is explored in the last Chapter, "The End of It".

Even on the Christmas day, '*Scrooge was busy in his counting-house.... The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open so that he might keep his eye upon his clerk*' (17-18).

As a natural skeptic rich adamant businessman, he never cares about the feelings of others as he monitors everything that happens around him. Because his only desire is to collect money, the feeling of skepticism is natural. This is the first incident to prove his harsh indifference. Scrooge doesn't give heed even to his nephew who says: 'A Merry Christmas uncle, God save you' (18). The reply comes with a frozen language: "Bah, said Scrooge, Humbug!" (18).

Dickens draws Scrooge's cold emotion by refusing to share Fred's cheer. Besides, he sheds light on the Scrooge's attitude by never giving heed to what his nephew utters:

'a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave' (20).

He never feels that his heart turns from its island ending this speech with only one frozen phrase: '*Good afternoon!*' said Scrooge. (21).

Dickens proceeds his portrayal by presenting that he not only refuses to share this feeling, he also refuses to pay for charity or to donate to help the poor. Scrooge replies saying:

‘I wish to be left alone... I don’t make merry myself at Christmas and I can’t afford to make idle people merry... It is not my business... It is enough for a man to understand his own business and not to interfere with other people’s... Good afternoon!’ (23).

Dickens depicts again that this stingy businessman doesn’t care even for his co-workers when he refuses to give Bob Cratchit a day off to celebrate Christmas with his family saying: ‘A poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December’ (25).

By the end of this chapter, Dickens represents Scrooge as haunted by the Ghost of Marley wearing chains in dreams and saying: ‘I wear the chain I forged in life,’ replied the ghost. ‘I made it link by link and yard by yard; I girded it on my own free will’ (33).

By this point, Dickens customizes his religious intentions to talk about the result of such behavior. This is the first glimpse from the life-after; he highlights that the true life is clearly drawn by those who are already dead. Yet, it is a real mistake not to learn that lesson and to avoid what they have already faced. This is what is expressed by Jacob Marely. ‘The whole time, said the Ghost, no rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse... I’m here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate’ (34-36).

From that moment on, Dickens endeavors to illustrate that ‘death’ really helps to change. This is illustrated when Scrooge returns awake again and ‘*he tried to say ‘humbug!’ but stopped at the first syllable’* (38).

Journey of Redemption

Dickens represents that the character transformation starts to take place after the visit of Marley’s Ghost. The first incidence of the change is Scrooge’s inability to utter his usual word as he really starts his way to think of his attitude and what would happen to him in the afterlife. The novelist in the other four chapters uses the straightforward allegory through his episodic narrative approach with a symbolic meaning. The symbolism lies in the notion of mysticism leading to redemption. Besides, Dickens adopts using the thematic functions for each Stave. For more exposition, Stave two is concerned with ‘The First of the Three Spirits’: ‘I am the Ghost of Christmas past... No your past’ (42).

Dickens portrays the visitation of the first Ghost a ‘*distinct and clear as ever*’ in order to represent memory in a childlike attitude. By this depiction, the writer takes his readers on a journey from the past to the future to allow them to understand the idea of reclamation. Dickens starts his novel representing Scrooge as very harsh. He portrays this to illustrate how mysticism helps to achieve the notion of salvation. What Dickens tries to foster in this chapter is the idea of ‘*Happiness and Time*’. The Ghost takes Scrooge to his childhood where he says: ‘*I*

was a boy here!' The scene of going back to the school where Scrooge is isolated and has nobody around him is a depiction of the root that causes the transformation: 'A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still' (45).

As a consequence, Dickens portrays the rich frozen-hearted businessman during his childhood. Not only does he live in isolation, he also breaks off his engagement with Belle- 'she left him and they parted' (57). This is how the bridge is built by Dickens to depict the mysticism in its purest form. He explores that the bitterness of his past life affects his image at the beginning of the novel. Moreover, by refreshing these memories, the transformation occurs with a religious atmosphere where the church clock bangs. Through his spiritual journey, he goes through more than one events of Christmas in the past and in the present – with 'The Second of the Three Spirits' (61).

The most important scene in this third Chapter is the representation of the compassion and happiness in Cratchit's house and in his nephew's house. Again the religious symbol '*the church bell*' is represented from time to time to focus on the religious aspect and mysticism. At that scene, he discovers that he is really busy with money and neglects any other feelings. The union of the family around the table revives feelings in Scrooge's heart when the family says: 'a Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!

It is the first thing to cause heartbeat when he recognizes the case of Tiny Tim. In addition, when he goes to Fred's party, he feels guilty when he hears his nephew saying:

‘I am sorry for him, I couldn’t be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won’t come and dine with us... A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is” (81).

Here, Scrooge has a real transformation in his character when Dickens narrates that he says ‘To-night’ cried Scrooge...Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask.’ (87).

Another influence on his attitude is the depiction of the girl and the boy who are in *‘No perversion of humanity.... This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both.’* (88).

Dickens presents this symbolic function to serve as the main and central symbol. He highlights that Christmas is about passion, feelings, and compassion; it has little to do with the solemnity of a religious occasion. It should be about feeling-share and never about emotional withdrawal- as what is represented at the beginning of the novel. The last spirit is the one that causes a complete transformation where the Ghost takes Scrooge to see his grave. Again the same symbol of religion appears (the church bell). However, the phantom takes him where he won’t be able to change anything. The Ghost *‘Yet to Come’* takes him to the place where he hears that a rich man has died in isolation. His own possessions are being sold. The transformation relies on what Scrooge says: ‘If there is any person on the town, who feels emotion cause by this man’s death... Spirit, I beseech you.’ (102).

The novelist portrays his reclamation as humanist through the scene when he collapses once he sees his grave and says:

‘I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all the Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on the stone.’ (110).

It is a presentation for the true redemption and reclamation through this spiritual journey. The last chapter- The End of It- is a depiction of his own transformation. This is portrayed in his speech to ‘the portly gentlemen’ when he says: ‘How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A Merry Christmas!’ (115).

The concept of change from hoarding money, from emotional withdrawal and from replying with ‘humbug’ into the person who does care about others saying:

‘And therefore I am about to raise your salary... A Merry Christmas Bob’ (118). is a real victory done by Dickens. Accordingly, spirituality is a way for the protagonist’s reclamation and salvation. He takes his character on a mystic journey to find that happiness, compassion, and forgiveness is only in the religious aspects of life: ‘Scrooge was better than his word... to Tiny Tim who didn’t die. He was a second father. He became as good as a friend, as good as a master and as good as a man.’ (119).

The last chapter is only a symmetrical structure of the first one where he meets every character.. albeit with a new attitude. This transformation from a stingy rich man into a humanist is the main objective of following the approach of mysticism in all Dickens’ writings.

General Discussion

Charles Dickens endeavors through his writings to shed light on that Ebenezer Scrooge gradually comes to understand, through the counsel of ghosts, that he must embrace his family, care about his good-natured clerk, and embody generosity. Through *'A Christmas Carol'*, Dickens illustrates that insensitivity corrupts souls. The Dickens' ability of Dickens to emphasize the spiritual symbols serves to help Scrooge to be emotionally connected with the past and spiritually connected with the future, where redemption truly exists. Through the journey of death, Dickens represents the promise of punishment as the way that leads to human transformation. Therefore, this journey underpins that mysticism is a flame to revive what is attributed to religious ceremonies in the humane life. Through Scrooge's journey, Dickens underscores the reclamation and the acceptance of the lower and destitute class, represented by Tiny Tim and Bob Cratchit. Breaking the barricade built by Scrooge, the novelist breaks through this to pinpoint the consequences of mysticism and spiritualism.

Conclusion

Dickens focuses on the theme of philanthropy as he believes that the reason behind the soul corruption is the dissatisfaction with life. His character rather suggests that it is not wealth or poverty that causes soul corruption. He depicts that the villains are not the wealthy but those who are busy with wealth more than their

own lives. One must avoid the inevitable end of Scrooge as represented in '*A Christmas Carol*'. During this novel, it is found that Scrooge, the main character whose heart is tough against the life around him, is very rich but is more concerned with money. Dickens describes a '*comfortable philanthropy in which the rich can retain their status so long as they generously share their wealth*'. He favored adopting the literary style full of fantasy and realism at the same time. Therefore, his portrayal of Scrooge and the visitation of the three spirits highlight that connection with others is the door to release from fear and to find happiness and security. Yet, Dickens never condemns any type of business and money-making *per se* or says that rich men will find it difficult to enter Heaven; this is because of his religious soul (Matthew 19:23–24). Although Scrooge's work is already valuable, this should also include '*charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence*'. Through redemption, Scrooge becomes '*as good as a man*'. The appeal for charity forces Scrooge to redeem himself. Besides, through the figure of Scrooge as a philanthropist at the end of the novel, Dickens offers a portrait of benevolence.

Reference

- Dickens, Charles. (1843). *A Christmas Carol*. London: Bradbury and Evans, Printers, Whitefriars.
- Rose, S. Jonathan, Shotwell, Stuart et Bertucci, Mary. (2005). *Scribe of Heaven, Swedenborg's Life, Work, and Impact*. USA: Swedenborg Foundation, Inc.

Smith, Andrew. (2012). *The Ghost Story, 1840-1920*. England: Manchester University Press.

Spurgeon, Caroline F. E. (1970). *Mysticism in English Literature*. Produced by Distributed Proofreaders: www.gutenberg.net. London: Keni Kat Press

Woolf, Virginia (1986). McNeillie, Andrew, ed. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, (2 ed.). Hogarth Press.

W.R. Inge. (1899). *Christian Mysticism*. London: Methuen & Co.

Data retrieved from:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Dickens

https://prezi.com/h_33rbjbc6z2/ghost-of-a-christmas-carol/

http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/45471/6/06_chapter%202.pdf

f

<http://wordsworth-editions.com/blog/christmas-carol>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-16907648>. By Matthew DavisBBC News Magazine

<https://www.philanthropydaily.com/charles-dickens-at-200/> By Jacqueline Pfeffer MerrillFebruary 7, 2012

<https://www.shmoop.com/christmas-carol/>

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/christmascarol/>

<http://www.vaahs.org.uk/2012/10/dickens-christianson/> By Frank Christianson, ‘Charity in the Novels of Charles Dickens’, *Voluntary Action History Society blog* (1 October 2012).